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Reidi Artom's Expansion Manifesto

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Reidi Artom's face is familiar to any citizen of Cularin; the enormous statue of her that stands in the center of Gadrin makes it difficult for anyone not to be able to visualize her features. But aside from her well-publicized jaunts across the galaxy and her penchant for attempting to name systems after herself (at least three different star systems had to be renamed after Reidi "discovered" them and registered them as variants of her own name, rather than using the galactic standard of basing the name off the central star or planet), relatively little was known about this industrious woman.

Recently, Tarasin of the Vriisan irstat came forward with a set of coordinates they claimed to have passed down from generation to generation. While now is not the time for frivolous exploration of Cularin's jungles (and these coordinates pointed deep inside the jungles), a team was eventually gathered. What they found was remarkable.

When she left Cularin, Reidi Artom left a record of what she had done here, and why, with the Vriisan irstat. The Mother of the Vriisan, Kasslan, spoke to the team about what she knew.

"A Mother before Niroida, the Mother whose place I have attempted to fill these last thirty years, told stories of the Artom. They were not her stories to tell, any more than they are mine. A Mother whose name is lost to us told them first. The Artom told our people that wherever she went, she left records - - but that she left them in the hands of those who were already present. She said a number of things, and each Mother in our line has been tasked with remembering a few of the words precisely. These, I share with you now.

"It is right that life should expand to fill the spaces available for its completion, to find the proper means of balance. Always remember this: That all life is sacred, that all striving deserves reward, and that whenever you reach a place that is new to you, there will be those who were there before. Respect those who came before. Trust them with your life and your hope, as by accepting your coming, they are entrusting you with theirs."

The Mother of the Vriisan irstat then led the explorers to a cave, guarded by the Vriisan since Reidi Artom left Cularin two hundred years ago. From that cave, the following writings - - on bizarre parchments - - were brought forth, giving us Reidi Artom's true thoughts on expansion in the galaxy.

There is a part of me that hopes that my words will never be read. Anyone

with whom I've entrusted their keeping knows very well that I did not create them to be read in anything but a situation most dire. (I'm not in love with my own voice, and my words often fall short of what I want them to say. I feel the need to explain things in too-great detail, and it grows tiring after only a short time.)

There is a long and a short version of this message. I will subject you to the long before offering you the short. Perhaps hearing it in two ways (I make the assumption that you will read both) will help it to sink in.

In the galaxy, there is life beyond what we can imagine. I have traveled from one side to another, walked on planets where the sun never sets and settled into orbit to watch ice hurricanes tear down mountains. I have seen binary stars. I have seen systems so new-formed that the vapors around the stars had yet to coalesce into bodies that might eventually become planets. I have seen systems where all that remained was a moon-sized body with the density of star and planets combined, where the energy radiating from the body threatened to overwhelm my sensors. But most of all I have seen life, in a thousand thousand forms. Two legs or four or eight or a hundred, winged or walking, chittering, speaking, grunting or howling - I've seen life. Some of it scares me. All of it is beautiful.

Much of the life I have seen is relatively untouched by the remainder of the galaxy. It has developed in its own way, in its own time. It looks at me with fearful eyes. I come from the sky. Some of the civilizations I have found have never even learned the secrets of flight, much less hyperspace. I have been treated as a being to be worshipped, and I have been savagely hunted. Through it all, I tried to understand (as well as a limited mind such as mine can) and to communicate. It was my responsibility, after all. If I could find them, so could someone else. If I had found them, someone else would.

I saw, when I was young, that the galaxy would not stop expanding. So long as there is space to be filled, the species who can travel the stars will seek to fill it. So long as there is space that can be taken, the species without scruples will attempt to take it.

What must be remembered, always, is that no claim of territorial expansion can be justified so long as the indigenous species do not recognize the rights of others to expand into their territory. Sentient creatures should at least be warned that their lives may be disrupted, that things may change in ways that they can neither predict nor understand (and if I had my way, we would ask permission before doing such; I do not, quite obviously, have my way). Nonsentients may not be warned (or warnable), but at least the likely impact of colonization on species that cannot speak for themselves should be assessed.

This brings me to the reason for this document, which you may treat as my expansion manifesto. (It is an admitted conceit of mine that the work I have done exploring the galaxy and expanding what is known may, one day, be of some import to someone; if I am wrong, it is a delusion that I will cling to like a gundark to a fresh-killed nerf for as long as I am able.) I hope that whomever reads this document has at least some appreciation for what has been done. If you are reading this, a system that I warned about the perils of colonization may be in danger of being wiped out through the careless and wasteful misappropriation of resources or a struggle between groups who are not even

from this system for its control. If either (or both) of these is true, I ask that you consider the following, and consider it well.

There is neither cause nor effect except that which we create. Through action or through inaction, we shape our own experiences as well as those of others with whom we interact. It is therefore incumbent upon us to sincerely reflect on the likely consequences of our actions, and to allow for the possibility that however well-intentioned we may be, it is also possible that we are wrong. None of us have ascended to the status of infallibility. It is always possible -- and frequently likely -- that we will make mistakes.

I mentioned two possibilities that might have triggered the delivery of this material to your hands. (If you are, in fact, a xenoarchaeologist somewhere far in the future who has simply happened upon this cache of information, I hope you find it useful. You are not now, nor were you ever, my target audience. That being said, I hope you conclude from your studies of these documents that at least some of us at the time in which I lived had thoughts of some existence beyond the short span of years we would ultimately occupy, and possessed an awareness of something beyond ourselves -- if I may be permitted the conceit of believing that I think beyond myself, and then praising that selfsame ability.) The first possibility is the careless or wasteful misappropriation of resources.

This can occur in a number of ways, of course. It might go without saying that one of the reasons that systems remained for me to "discover," after so many generations of space exploration, was a lack of resources that interested the remainder of the galaxy. Our species (I speak in the broad sense of space-going species) are generally creatures of faddish habit. That is to say, we know what we like, and we go after what we like, but we also tend to fall into whatever phenomenon has most recently been presented to us as the "next big thing."

Habit encourages colonization. We habitually travel between the stars. As such, any freshly discovered system that offers resources relevant to traveling between the stars will be colonized and have its natural wares appropriated as quickly as possible. We habitually make war on one another. Thus, any system we happen upon that provides the supplies we need to wage war more efficiently becomes grounds for plunder. I could list dozens of habits we have, from the painful (war) to the mundane (some species prefer sweet foods). I will not do so, instead allowing you to think of such habits on your own.

The fads are more short-lived. We discover something that is interesting or pleasant, and we engage ourselves with it, quite intensely, for a relatively short period of time. When the excitement wears off, we leave the fad again. Little in our lives has changed.

Fad does not encourage colonization. Fads that require colonization do not become fads, because they are too much work. Fads work best when they are based off things that we have access to, habitually, but that we've never actually looked at in a given way before. The current system, for example, offers beautiful woods.

Who uses woods? Right now, no one. A few decades ago, woods from several Outer Rim territories became very popular with the intelligentsia on Coruscant for use in furniture. It was a decorating fad that lasted five years, give or

take. Then it was gone. But the place where the materials came from - - several territories - - had been colonized before, and remained colonized after the fad ended. Other resources existed there.

When that fad began, no one rushed to this system. It wasn't worth the time or the credits to do so. The fad would not support continued existence here, and until something is found that will keep individuals settled, the population will remain primarily centered in the quaint little tribes that dot the jungles of the main world.

It is not unlikely, in any system, that in its early years, certain of its resources may be violently depleted. We must remember that the system is not here for our benefit any more than we are here for its. We must think not in terms of "What can we get here?" but instead, "How can we live here?" All things are interconnected. If we deplete the place where we live, even if that occurs only for a short time, we also deplete ourselves. That we are separate from the space we inhabit - - that we can act on it without feeling consequences - - is an egocentric fallacy. We are not just ourselves. We are also, in part, all of the things around us.

The second possibility (noting that these are not mutually exclusive) is that the system is imperiled because multiple groups have come here and now vie for control of something to which neither (none?) of them is inherently entitled. It's a curious thing: We sentient pick a sector of space that "belongs" to no one (or if it does come close to belonging to anyone, it's someone who was here eons ago, before we even considered coming here) and argue most vociferously over who controls it.

We often call this "war."

I don't suppose I need to proselytize about the evils of war. People die, the survivors live off anger and hate and a dozen other harmful emotions, and the galaxy changes, if at all, for the worse. No one wins.

What needs to be remembered is that the right to "claim" a particular place is not a function of military power. If such a right exists (and I do not know if it does), then it surely has relatively little to do with who has more weapons, and much more to do with who loves the place itself. There are always those who want a particular place, who believe they should control it. But there are also those, in many cases, who are connected to the place. They are part of it. They could no longer leave the place than you or I could remove our brains and continue functioning. The species and the place are inseparable. These species, quite often, become bystanders in wars.

Except that there are no bystanders in wars. There are only combatants and accidents.

Think carefully about your path. I don't claim to be the wisest of individuals, but I've seen a lot. Beauty and sorrow, joy and pain. Expansion is good, and should be continued. But it should not do so at the expense of what has gone before.

I leave you with the short version of this rather extended bit of folk wisdom. It is right that life should expand to fill the spaces available for its completion, to find the proper means of balance. Always remember that all

life is sacred, that all striving deserves reward, and that whenever you reach a place that is new to you, there will be those who were there before. Respect those who came before. Trust them with your life and your hope, as by accepting your coming, they are entrusting you with theirs.